

Message Text

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67

ACTION ARA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-02 INR-07 L-03

NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 USIA-06 SSC-01

CPR-01 /059 W

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P 062110Z JUL 76

FM AMEMBASSY TEGUCIGALPA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 3861

INFO AMEMBASSY GUATEMALA

AMEMBASSY MANAGUA

AMEMBASSY SAN JOSE

AMEMBASSY SAN SALVADOR PRIORITY

UNCINCSO

C O N F I D E N T I A L TEGUCIGALPA 3278

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, PINT, HO

SUBJECT: NEW FOREIGN MINISTER NAMED

BEGIN SUMMARY. FONMIN PERDOMO WAS DISMISSED ON JULY 2 AND COLONEL ROBERTO PALMA GALVEZ WAS NAMED IN HIS PLACE. PERDOMO HAD BEEN THE TARGET OF INCREASING CRITICISM LATELY BECAUSE OF WHAT WAS VIEWED AS HIS "WEAK DEFENSE" OF HONDURAS' NATIONAL INTERESTS. PALMA'S APPOINTMENT SIGNALS THE VIRTUAL "FREEZE" OF MEANINGFUL NEGOTIATIONS WITH EL SALVADOR FOR THE IMMEDIATE FUTURE. END SUMMARY.

1. FONMIN PERDOMO WAS DISMISSED ON JULY 2 AND COLONEL ROBERTO PALMA GALVEZ WAS NAMED AS HIS REPLACEMENT. COLONEL GALVEZ HAS RESIDED IN GUATEMALA SINCE 1964, FIRST AS CHIEF OF THE HON-
DURAN DELEGATION TO THE CENTRAL AMERICAN DEFENSE COUNCIL AND, AFTER THE 1969 WAR, AS THE HONDURAN OBSERVER TO THE ORGANIZATION (SEPTTEL CONTAINS BIO INFORMATION).

2. THE NEW FONMIN HAD A LONG DISCUSSION WITH CHIEF OF STATE
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MELGAR ON JULY 2 PRIOR TO HIS WEEKEND FLIGHT TO GUATEMALA

TO MAKE ARRANGEMENTS FOR HIS RETURN TO TEGUCIGALPA, POSSIBLY THE WEEK OF JULY 12. IN AN IMPROMPTU PRESS CONFERENCE AT THE AIRPORT, PALMA SAID THAT HIS NOMINATION DID NOT SIGNAL ANY NEW ROUND OF NEGOTIATIONS WITH EL SALVADOR BECAUSE "FOREIGN POLICY CONTINUITY IS AN ATTRIBUTE OF THE CHIEF OF STATE." HE ADDED THAT HE WAS AWARE OF THE PERDOMO-BORGONOVO TALKS BUT IS NOT INTIMATELY ACQUAINTED WITH THEIR CONTENT. HE POINTED OUT THAT HE WAS A PARTICIPANT IN THE HONDURAS/EL SALVADOR TALKS IN MEXICO DURING 1973 WHEN CESAR BATRES WAS FOREIGN MINISTER.

3. COMMENT. PERDOMO WAS WELL AWARE OF THE CONSTANT CRITICISM BEING LEVELED AGAINST HIM WITHIN THE SUPERIOR DEFENSE COUNCIL (SDC) AND BY INFLUENTIAL HONDURANS. HE HAD NO SUPPORT FROM FUNCTIONARIES WITHIN THE MINISTRY AND WAS BEING CONTINUALLY CRITICIZED BY THEM IN THEIR CONVERSATIONS WITH FOREIGN DIPLOMATS, INFLUENTIAL HONDURAN CIVILIANS AND WITH MEMBERS OF THE SDC. FURTHERMORE, EX-FONMIN AND PRESENT PRESIDENTIAL ADVISER, CESAR BATRES, PUBLICLY EXPRESSED HIS DISAGREEMENT WITH THE MANNER IN WHICH PERDOMO WAS HANDLING THE NEGOTIATIONS. EX-PRESIDENT RAMON ERNESTO CRUZ AND EX-FONMINS SUCH AS JORGE FIDEL DURON HAD ALSO PUBLICLY QUESTIONED PERDOMO'S POLICIES. THIS SITUATION, COMBINED WITH CONSTANT MEDIA CRITICISMS, UNDOUBTEDLY CONCERNED MEMBERS OF THE SDC. IN ADDITION, MANY SDC MEMBERS WERE THEMSELVES IN DISAGREEMENT WITH WHAT THEY SAW AS PERDOMO'S "WEAK DEFENSE" OF HONDURAS'S "LEGITIMATE INTERESTS." AS A RESULT, PERDOMO'S POSITION BECAME PROGRESSIVELY WEAKER; FURTHERMORE, THE SDC REFUSED TO HEAR HIM DEFEND HIS POLICIES WHEN HE ASKED TO APPEAR BEFORE THE GROUP. THE SDC, THEREFORE, DECIDED TO REMOVE PERDOMO AND REPLACE HIM WITH COLONEL PALMA, CLEARLY IN THE BELIEF THAT PALMA WILL NOT TRY TO MOVE AHEAD OF THE SDC IN INITIATING NEGOTIATIONS. LT. COLONEL CESAR ELVIR SIERRA, ARMY CHIEF OF STAFF, TOLD POLOFF AT JULY 4 RECEPTION THAT PALMA HAD BEEN NAMED AS A RESULT OF THE SDC'S DISCONTENT OVER PERDOMO'S PERFORMANCE. IT IS PROBABLE THAT PALMA'S APPOINTMENT SIGNALS THE VIRTUAL "FREEZE" OF MEANINGFUL NEGOTIATIONS WITH EL SALVADOR FOR THE IMMEDIATE FUTURE. THIS DOES NOT MEAN THAT THERE WILL BE NO TALKS, ONLY THAT THE SDC AND MELGAR WILL IMPOSE POLICY GUIDELINES ON PALMA THAT WILL NOT PERMIT HIM MUCH FLEXIBILITY

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IN NEGOTIATIONS. END COMMENT.
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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 JAN 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: FOREIGN RELATIONS, CABINET, BIOGRAPHIC INFORMATION, PERSONNEL APPOINTMENTS
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 06 JUL 1976
Decaption Date: 01 JAN 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Authority: powellba
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 28 MAY 2004
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1976TEGUCI03278
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Film Number: D760260-0566
From: TEGUCIGALPA
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1976/newtext/t19760786/aaaacydh.tel
Line Count: 109
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Office: ACTION ARA
Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 2
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: n/a
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Authority: powellba
Review Comment: n/a
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 16 JUL 2004
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review History: RELEASED <16 JUL 2004 by izenbei0>; APPROVED <26 OCT 2004 by powellba>
Review Markings:

Margaret P. Grafeld
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
04 MAY 2006

Review Media Identifier:
Review Referrals: n/a
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: NEW FOREIGN MINISTER NAMED BEGIN SUMMARY. FONMIN PERDOMO WAS DISMISSED ON JULY 2 AND
TAGS: PFOR, PINT, HO, (PALMA GALVEZ, ROBERT)
To: STATE
Type: TE
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 04 MAY 2006